STAFF SUMMARY SHEET

	TO	ACTION	SIGNATURE (Surname), GRADE AND DATE		TO	ACTION	SIGNATURE (Surname), GRADE AND DATE
1	DFPY	sig	Cook, 0-6, 19 Feb 15	6			
2	DFER	approve	Soltz, AD 25, 20 Feb 15	7			
3	DFPY	action	Brent *(Author /Originator)*	8			
4				9			
5				10			

SURNAME OF ACTION OFFICER AND GRADE	SYMBOL	PHONE	TYPIST'S INITIALS	SUSPENSE DATE
Kyle, AD-22	DFPY	333-1590	bgk	20150331

SUBJECT	DATE
Clearance for Material for Public Release USAFA-DE-PA-026	20150218

SUMMARY

1. PURPOSE. To provide security and policy review on the document at Tab 1 prior to release to the public.

2. BACKGROUND.
Authors: Dr. Brent G. Kyle

Title: "Review of 'The Lewd, the Rude, and the Nasty: A Study of Thick Concepts in Ethics'"
Circle one: Abstract   Tech Report   Journal Article X   Speech   Paper   Presentation   Poster

        Thesis/Dissertation   Book   Other: ____book review_____

Check all that apply (For Communications Purposes):

        [] CRADA (Cooperative Research and Development Agreement) exists

        [] Photo/ Video Opportunities   [] STEM-outreach Related   [] New Invention/ Discovery/ Patent

Description: book review for 'The Philosophical Quarterly'.

 # Needs Disclaimer,
"the views expressed ..."

Release Information: exact release date unknown, best guess: September 2015.

Previous Clearance information: (If applicable) N/A

Recommended Distribution Statement: Distribution A: approved for public release, distribution unlimited

3. DISCUSSION. The article contains *no* classified information. It does *not* discuss any US policies. It does *not* disparage people such as POTUS, SECDEF, or military leaders.

4. RECOMMENDATION. DFER sign Coord block above indicating document is suitable for public release. Suitability is based solely on the document being unclassified, not jeopardizing DoD interest, and being irrelevant to any official policy.

//Signed--Brent G. Kyle, 19 December 2014//
DR. BRENT G. KYLE, USAF
Assistant Professor, Dept of Philosophy

AF IMT 1768, 19840901, V5   PREVIOUS EDITION WILL BE USED.

Review of *The Lewd, the Rude, and the Nasty: A Study of Thick Concepts in Ethics*, by Pekka Väyrynen. (Oxford UP, 2013, Pp. xi + 288. Price £ 32.99 hb.)

Brent G. Kyle

Väyrynen's book is a comprehensive and detailed discussion of thick ethical concepts, utilizing the toolkit of philosophy of language and linguistics to argue that these concepts do not have the philosophical significance normally attributed to them (e.g. regarding ethical objectivity and the fact-value distinction). When ethicists argue for substantive conclusions involving thick terms and concepts (e.g. 'courageous' and 'kind'), their arguments often assume the Semantic View—that the truth-conditional meanings of thick terms are evaluative. Väyrynen challenges this assumption in three ways. (i) He argues that various phenomena commonly taken to support the Semantic View (e.g. underdetermination and shapelessness) don't actually support it. (ii) He advances three arguments against the Semantic View, which I shall discuss below. And (iii) he proposes that thick terms are associated with evaluations by way of a pragmatic relation rather than a semantic one.

Väyrynen's pragmatic view of the relationship between thick terms and evaluation is new to the thick concepts literature, and rightly deserves more attention than can be given here. But, very briefly, he proposes that the evaluative implications of paradigmatic thick terms are "not-at-issue" in normal contexts (ch. 5). Roughly, an implication is at-issue if it is part of the main point of the conversation at hand, and it is not-at-issue if it's part of the background. Väyrynen takes this pragmatic view to be "superior to its rivals by standard methodological principles" from the philosophy of language and linguistics (p. 10).

Although there's much to discuss from Väyrynen's book, this review will focus squarely on his arguments for rejecting the Semantic View, since these arguments extend throughout two complete chapters and are crucial to the book's overall aim (i.e. that of deflating the significance of thick concepts). His two main arguments against the Semantic View are that the evaluations of thick terms survive in various contexts that cancel semantic entailments, and that these evaluations are deniable in ways that semantic entailments aren't (p. 59ff). Moreover, Väyrynen provides a third argument at various points in the

book—he objects to the Semantic View by appealing to a generalized form of Grice's Razor, a standard linguistic principle that warns against making unnecessary semantic postulates (pp. 55, 123, 157). I address all three arguments in what follows.

1. Projection. Väyrynen's first argument against the Semantic View involves the claim that thick terms have evaluations that project in the following sense:

> An implication projects if and only if it survives as an utterance implication when the expression that triggers the implication occurs under the syntactic scope of an entailment-cancelling operator (p. 60).

Entailment-cancelling operators include negations, interrogatives, modals, and conditionals. If an evaluation projects in the above sense, then it's not a semantic entailment of the thick term in question.

How does Väyrynen argue that thick evaluations project? His argument turns on the notion of an objectionable thick term. Some thick terms express values that ought to be rejected—potential examples include 'chaste' and 'lewd'. It needn't be that these terms *actually* express values that ought to be rejected. Väyrynen only needs to claim that these terms can *in principle* be regarded as objectionable. Indeed, it seems that all paradigmatic thick terms could in principle be regarded as objectionable, and this allows Väyrynen's argument to generalize widely. To frame the argument, he points out that people who regard 'lewd' as objectionable (i.e. lewd-objectors) would be reluctant to utter sentences like the following (p. 62ff):

(1) a. Madonna's show is lewd.
    b. Madonna's show isn't lewd.
    c. Is Madonna's show lewd?
    d. {Possibly/probably} Madonna's show will be lewd.
    e. If Madonna's show is lewd, the tabloid press will go nuts.

Since 'lewd' occurs under the scope of entailment-cancelling operators in (1b-e), and lewd-objectors would be reluctant to utter these sentences, this seems to support Väyrynen's claim that an evaluation associated with 'lewd' projects.

2

For the sake of argument, let's suppose he's right in holding that an evaluation of 'lewd' projects. Does this entail that the Semantic View is not true of 'lewd'? No. The mere fact that *an* evaluative content projects doesn't entail that there's *no* evaluative content that's part of the thick term's meaning. Consider an analogous situation involving the non-evaluative expression 'stop':

(2) a. Anna stopped smoking.
   b. Anna didn't stop smoking.
   c. Did Anna stop smoking?
   d. {Possibly/probably} Anna will stop smoking.
   e. If Anna stopped smoking, that's good for her.

Each utterance implies a non-evaluative content—that Anna was a smoker. This non-evaluative content projects, since it is implied when 'stop' occurs under the scope of entailment-cancelling operators. But the mere fact that *a* non-evaluative content projects obviously doesn't entail that its trigger—'stop'—has *no* non-evaluative content as part of its meaning. This expression is associated with at least two non-evaluative contents—its semantic non-evaluative content and its projected non-evaluative content.

For all we know, an analogous situation might hold for 'lewd'. This term might be associated with two evaluative contents—its semantic evaluative content and its projected evaluative content. Väyrynen's projection-based argument leaves this possibility open, and is therefore consistent with the Semantic View of 'lewd'. Of course, one might object that it's un-parsimonious to posit two evaluative contents for 'lewd'. But this objection is distinct from Väyrynen's projection-based argument. I shall deal with the issue of parsimony in section 3.

To be fair, Väyrynen is cognizant of the possibility of multiple evaluations being associated with a thick term, and he intends to concentrate only on the one that is "most closely connected" to that term, regardless of whether the connection turns out to be semantic or pragmatic (p. 31). However, by Väyrynen's own lights, an evaluation that is semantically associated with the thick term should count as most closely connected to it. So, if it turns out that 'lewd' is semantically associated with an evaluation E,

3

then Väyrynen would have to agree that E is most closely connected to 'lewd'. His projection-based argument in no way rules out this possibility.

2. Deniability. Väyrynen's second argument against the Semantic View is that the evaluations of thick terms are deniable in ways that semantic entailments are not. He provides examples like the following:

> (3) Whether or not Madonna's show is lewd, it's not bad in any way distinctive of explicit sexual display.

In a recent review of Väyrynen's book, Matthew Bedke (2014) points out that (3) doesn't seem felicitous, contrary to what Väyrynen claims. I agree with Bedke. But perhaps Väyrynen can hold that there is *some* context in which (3) would be felicitous, even if it's not among the contexts normally associated with (3). And, on that basis, Väyrynen may advance his objection: In some contexts, the evaluation of 'lewd' in (3) is cancelled, and this suggests that this evaluation doesn't belong to the meaning of 'lewd' (pp. 70-2).

However, as I've pointed out elsewhere (Kyle 2013, 5-7), sentences like (3) contain quantifiers, which are paradigmatic examples of context-sensitive expressions. In (3), 'any' is the quantifier—it quantifies over a domain containing ways (distinctive of sexual display) in which behaviors are bad. The context of utterance determines which domain is associated with (3). Now, there are many ways (distinctive of sexual display) in which a behavior can be bad—for example, it might be a morally bad sexual display (w1), an aesthetically bad sexual display (w2), or a socially bad sexual display (w3). And perhaps there's a way (w4) which can only be expressed in a circular fashion, by using the word 'lewd' (e.g. "it's bad in the way associated with lewdness"). Let's suppose that, say, w4 is the way that is implied by typical 'lewd' utterances, whereas w1-w3 are not. There is a possible context of utterance where the domain associated with (3) includes only w1-w3, and excludes w4. The Semantic View can hold that (3) is non-contradictory in this context. Since the relevant contextual domain excludes w4, the second part of

4

(3) does not express anything that contradicts the first part. Väyrynen nowhere addresses this way of dealing with sentences like (3), so I shall leave it for discussion.

3. *Grice's Razor.* We have seen that the Semantic View is consistent with projection and deniability. But Väyrynen also claims that his pragmatic view is preferable to the Semantic View, because pragmatic explanations, which appeal only to general principles of communication, "are, other things being equal, preferable to explanations that require postulates like semantic entailments, conventional implicatures or semantic presuppositions" (p. 127). Väyrynen is here appealing to a "modest generalization" of Grice's Razor, a principle that warns against making unnecessary semantic postulates (p. 55fn).

The trouble is that Väyrynen himself posits semantic entailments in order to explain data that the Semantic View purports to explain. To see why, consider what would be needed to explain why (4) is infelicitous in normal contexts:

(4) A is lewd and not bad in any way.

Proponents of the Semantic View can claim that (4) is odd because it is contradictory in normal contexts— its first conjunct semantically entails the denial of its second conjunct (provided the quantifier-domain of (4) includes the way of being bad associated with 'lewd'). How does Väyrynen explain the oddity of (4)? He holds that a claim like (5) below is pragmatically implied by 'A is lewd':

(5) Overt displays of sexuality that transgress conventional boundaries are bad in a certain way (p. 62).

And he explains the oddity of (4) by holding that (4) and (5) jointly imply that A is bad in a certain way, which contradicts the second conjunct of (4).

But why does he think (4) and (5) imply that A is bad in a certain way? The answer is not obvious, since (4) ascribes lewdness to A whereas (5) makes no mention of lewdness. Väyrynen's explanation

requires an additional claim, which he makes in another context (p. 58). There, he provides a non-evaluative semantic postulate:

N: 'A is lewd' semantically entails that A is an overt display of sexuality that transgresses conventional boundaries.

Although Väyrynen takes this to be a mere "proxy" for whatever non-evaluative content is semantically entailed by 'lewd', it's clear that his explanation wouldn't succeed without something like N. Otherwise, there would be no connection between the first conjunct of (4) and the denial of its second conjunct. Thus, Väyrynen's preferred way of explaining the connection between 'lewd' and 'bad' requires a semantic postulate. It's therefore unclear why he thinks Grice's Razor favors his theory over the Semantic View (p. 157).

Perhaps Väyrynen's objection is that the Semantic View must hold that 'lewd' semantically entails an evaluative content *in addition to* what's stated in N. So, the Semantic View is inferior because it posits everything that Väyrynen posits plus something extra. But proponents of the Semantic View can posit something *instead of* N, rather than in addition to it. Instead of N, they can posit something like

E: 'A is lewd' semantically entails that A is an overt display of sexuality that is *bad* in a certain way.

Let's take E to be a mere "proxy" for whatever the Semantic View might posit instead of Väyrynen's N. The key point is that the Semantic View can use their preferred evaluative content to *supplant* some of Väyrynen's non-evaluative content, rather than add to it. Moreover, Väyrynen provides no reason to think the connection mentioned in E—between 'lewd' and 'bad'—can be explained through pragmatic means *alone*. As we've seen, his preferred way of explaining this connection requires a semantic postulate, such as N.

Alternatively, Väyrynen could object that the contents posited by the Semantic View are of two completely different types—evaluative and non-evaluative. In that way, the Semantic View multiplies *types* of content beyond necessity. But this objection is unwarranted, given that Väyrynen also relies on a

6

distinction between evaluative and non-evaluative content (p. 29). Moreover, the Semantic View could draw the needed distinction on the level of terms rather than contents. The Semantic View could then be framed as the view that thick terms semantically entail the contents of *evaluative terms* (e.g. 'bad'), without claiming that these contents are different in kind from non-evaluative ones.

Meta-ethicists are often suspicious of positing evaluative contents, but this suspicion is not warranted by any *standard linguistic principle*, like Grice's Razor. And Väyrynen purports to be relying on standard linguistic principles in supporting his view over the Semantic View. Yet there is no such principle to be found.

4. Overall. I've argued that Väyrynen's main arguments against the Semantic View don't succeed. One might think he has succeeded with the more modest aim of showing that ethicists ought to suspend judgment on the Semantic View. But even this is dubious. Väyrynen is liberal in claiming that certain non-evaluative contents are semantically entailed by thick terms, and he backs this up by relying on conceptual-defectiveness judgments, like the following:

> [T]here is something conceptually defective in thinking that helping another person to flourish without adverse consequences to anyone else is cruel [...] (p. 5).

However, the same sorts of judgments support the view that 'cruel' is semantically evaluative—there is something conceptually defective in thinking one can be cruel without being *bad to anyone*.

It should be noted that Väyrynen's ultimate conclusion in the book is that thick terms and concepts do not have the philosophical significance normally attributed to them. He supports this conclusion by challenging an assumption—the Semantic View—which underlies the traditional reasons for focusing on thick concepts. Although I have argued that his strategy doesn't succeed, I have not argued that thick concepts are especially significant within ethics. For all I've said, Väyrynen's ultimate conclusion might stand.

Väyrynen's book incorporates fascinating discussions on numerous meta-ethical issues that have gone unexamined in this review. Such topics include evaluation, variability, shapelessness, irreducibility, disentanglement, parochiality, and underdetermination. In step with the three arguments I have discussed, Väyrynen approaches these major topics with equal precision and attention to linguistic detail. As such, his book deserves careful study by ethicists and linguists alike.

The United States Air Force Academy   *Brent G. Kyle*

References

Bedke, M. (2014). "Review of *The Lewd, the Rude, and the Nasty*," *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews* (4-30-2014).

Kyle, B. (2013). "How Are Thick Terms Evaluative?" *Philosophers' Imprint* 13, 1-20.